

Tom Lonsdale and Associates

Veterinary Surgeons

Riverstone Veterinary Hospital
Garfield Road
Riverstone NSW 2765

Phone: (02) 627-4011

Fax: (02) 627-4285

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Dr W D Tavernor

Editor

JSAP

7 Mansfield Street

LONDON W1M 0AT

UK

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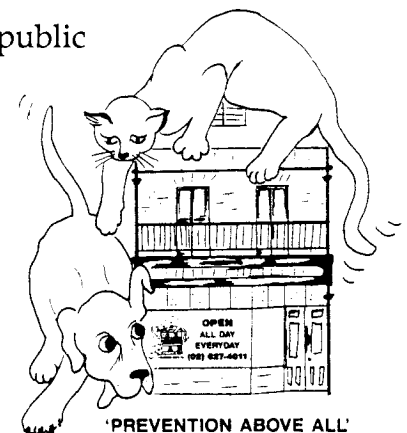
Dear Sir,

'DIET AND POOR ORAL HEALTH MUST BE CONSIDERED*'

"If you are not part of the answer, you are part of the problem." J.F.K.

An Australian veterinary sociological, political and scientific revolution is underway. Since December, 1991, indignant private practitioner veterinarians have slammed the hypocrisy of a 'healing profession' being in collusion with the multinational pet food industry. It was alleged that widespread, diet-induced disease of pet animals was accompanied by serious national economic and environmental consequences. Parallels were drawn with the exploitation of Third World communities by baby milk formula companies in league with local health-care professionals.

Despite the depths of concern of segments of the membership, the leaders of the profession failed to act until March, 1993, when the first and only public response was to ban discussion in the Australian Veterinary Association Newsletter. *'AVA News believes that this issue has been aired fully over the last year and does not intend to run further correspondence. - Ed.'* The same issue carried extensive coverage



of pet food company matters. Lacking action, and denied a voice, some practitioner members took the matter to the floor of the Association 1993 AGM. In the face of AVA Executive, and pet food industry, opposition the ban was lifted and a motion passed to have a committee established to investigate the links between diet and disease. (Subsequently limited to a consideration of diet and periodontal disease.)

At a cost of £3500, a 'literature search was conducted by the committee which comprised of paid consultant, Associate Professor David Watson, epidemiologist Dr Peter Groves and Doug Bryden, Director of the Sydney University Post Graduate Committee in Veterinary Science'. The outline report stated, 'There is reasonable evidence that soft diets are associated with increased prevalence and severity of periodontal disease.' 'Periodontal disease is arguably the most common disease condition seen in small animal practice and its effects on the gums and teeth can significantly affect the health and well being of affected animals. This is sufficient in itself to give reason for concern. Proof of additional systemic effects is not necessary to justify further action.' The committee advised, *'Those investigating small animal health problems should also take diet and diet consistency into account when researching systemic diseases - possible confounding effects of diet and poor oral health must be considered* in such studies'*. (AVA News, 1994)

Persuading university teachers and researchers of these imperatives is not an easy task. Students continue to be taught in the conventional way with the emphasis being placed on the diagnosis and treatment of end-stage disease. For a wide range of degenerative diseases the preventative health options are rarely, if ever, considered. In all clinical and nutritional research work there is an obvious need for utilisation of control groups of animals fed a 'natural' diet from birth. I have yet to see such a study. Papers giving consideration to the *'possible confounding effects of diet and poor oral health'* have not begun to appear. The serious implications of this

oversight are illustrated in two recent contributions.

A paper entitled 'Intussusception in 12 cats' (Bellenger and Beck, 1994) reviewed the case histories of twelve cats presented at the University of Sydney Veterinary Teaching Hospital. In the absence of recorded data it would be valid to assume that the cats were not fed a 'natural' diet. The table of '*relevant clinical data from the 12 cases*' contained no reference to oral hygiene. Excluding a twelve-year old cat suffering from lymphosarcoma, the other eleven averaged 6.4 months of age. It should be borne in mind that kittens shed their primary, and simultaneously gain their secondary, dentition between four and six months of age. If kittens are raised on artificial food during this physiological upheaval they lack the essential gum massage and oral cleansing, and suffer a resultant malodorous gingivitis. This should be perceived as a significant insult to the immature immune system and the collagen supporting the teeth. Raw carcass-fed cats pass a small amount of virtually odourless faeces. Cats fed on artificial foods produce copious, malodorous stools. If under these diet-induced burdens, a kitten's collagen-rich bowel could be expected to behave in an aberrant fashion. Absence of diet and oral hygiene information from the case records ensures that they are not considered as part of the possible aetiology and, consequently, cannot be invoked as possible planks in a preventative platform. Readers are left with the sense that invasive surgery is the only treatment and preventative option.

A case of eosinophilic granuloma in a cross-bred dog was treated at the University of Melbourne Veterinary Clinical Centre and was reported together with an accompanying literature review of 33 cases. (Norris, 1994). Pathology, aetiology, prevalence and treatment were discussed. We are not informed to the contrary regarding these animals, but experience tells us that most domestic dogs are fed

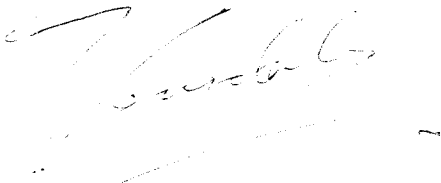
processed food. The state of periodontal health of these dogs was not reported but, *'More than 85% of dogs over the age of three years have periodontal disease to a degree that would benefit from treatment'*. (Penman and Emily 1991). Periodontal disease arises out of a bacterial-host immune reaction. (Harvey and Emily, 1993) Collagen of the periodontium is damaged in this interaction. As with periodontal disease, eosinophilic granuloma complex is an immune-mediated and collagen disease. In the light of this, and the AVA Committee findings, it would be safe to assume that eosinophilic granuloma and periodontal disease run concurrently in the majority of the 34 cases studied. As with so many studies, an incomplete methodology appears to have resulted in key aspects of this disease syndrome being overlooked.

Society has deferred to veterinarians as animal health experts. The current orthodoxy allows them to recommend, and even sell, heat-treated grain and bovine offal-based diets for small domestic carnivores. Some have defined this as the inescapable norm. Dr Jill Maddison, President of the Australian Small Animal Veterinary Association and part-time consultant to a pet food division of Nestlé has adopted the current custom. *'I recommend good quality commercial pet food to my clients and feed my own animals commercial pet food. As I care very deeply about my own pets and their welfare is of the greatest importance to me, I hope you will respect that my motives for recommending commercial products do not have a hidden and scurrilous agenda.'* (Correspondence on file) With the passage of time, we will gain a better understanding of the roles played and the agendas of the different groupings.

Thomas Kuhn wrote *'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions'* (1972) which was described as a landmark in intellectual history. In this book, he provides a clear understanding that conceptual revolutions are a major and necessary part of scientific endeavour. He explains that scientists working closely with older concepts

frequently resist change. They will receive encouragement once journals come to insist on a more rigorous methodology which guards against ongoing errors of omission. Associations will need to take careful stock of for whom they exist. In the Australian Veterinary Association context 81.1% voted for preservation of the *status quo* in the last presidential election. I was pleased with the 17.9% support for what was billed as my 'extreme' position. The once 'extreme' view that the earth is round is now supported by everyone in the knowledge that it is only an illusion that the earth is flat. Unfortunately too many persist with the illusion that processed food provides for acceptable dietary and oral health requirements of domestic carnivores when in fact everyone knows that 'nature knows best'.

Signed,



Tom Lonsdale

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